

Message Text

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ACTION PM-04

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 INR-07 ACDA-07 CIAE-00 H-02 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 MC-02

IGA-02 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-07 SAJ-01 COME-00

EUR-12 /090 W

----- 100738

P R 072135Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4445

INFO SECDEF

CNO

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 3542

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS CO

SUBJ: USG ALTERNATIVE TO PURCHASE OF SOVIET VESSELS

REF STATE 077869 (312348Z MAR 76)

1. DEPARTMENT'S COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE IS APPRECIATED, BUT
THREE POINTS CAUSE CONCERN.

2. FIRST IS POSSIBLE NEED FOR CLARIFICATION. PARA ONE REFTEL
REFERS TO "GOC PROPOSAL TO ACCEPT US EXCESS NON-MISSILE CARRYING
VESSELS, RATHER THAN NEW SOVIET MISSILE VESSELS." QUOTED
PHRASE CONSIDERABLY OVERSTATES THE CASE. GOC HAS MADE NO SUCH
PROPOSAL. WHAT OUR DEFENSE MINISTRY SOURCES SAID IS THAT THEY
WANT TO PRESENT TO GOC DECISION LEVELS A PLAUSIBLE US ALTERNATIVE
TO THE SOVIET OFFER. WE BELIEVE THAT THE COLOMBIANS WOULD MUCH
PREFER US EQUIPMENT AND TECHNICAL PERSONNEL TO SOVIET PGM'S
PERSONNEL, AND INFLUENCE; NONETHELESS, THE VENEZUELAN BUY OF
MILLIONS OF DOLLARSWORTH OF ARMS CONCERNS THE COLOMBIANS AND
THEY MAY IN DESPERATION TAKE WHATEVER SHIPS THEY CAN GET
REGARDLESS OF SOURCE. COLNAV HAS INQUIRED ABOUT A FRAM II
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DESTROYER (DD), A SELF-PROPELLED REPAIR BARGE (ARB), A SMALL

OILER (AOG), A FLEET TUG (ATF) AND THE ASHVILLE CLASS PATROL CRAFT (PG). TO DATE THE ONLY OFFER FROM THEIR BUY LIST HAS BEEN THE REPAIR BARGE. THROUGH US MEDIA THEY ARE WELL AWARE THAT SHIPS OF SOME OF THESE OTHER TYPES ARE BEING DECOMMISSIONED THIS YEAR. TO SOME SENIOR OFFICERS IN COLNAV IT APPEARS THEREFORE THAT THE US NO LONGER DESIRES TO HELP THEM.

3. BECAUSE OF THE VENEZUELAN PURCHASES AND THE WELL SUBSTANTIATED OFFER OF THE SOVIETS, THERE IS A NEED TO TAKE ACTION NOW. INACTIVITY ON OUR PART COULD CAUSE COLNAV OFFICIALS TO TURN TO THIRD COUNTRY SOURCES. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES THE USSR OFFER WOULD BE HARD FOR THE GOC TO DECLINE.

4. SECOND CONCERN IS WITH TIMING. A MONTH AGO, WE ESTIMATED DECISION POINT WITHIN 60-90 DAYS. THIRTY OF THOSE DAYS ARE NOW GONE. GIVEN YOUR PROJECTION OF "SEVERAL WEEKS" UNTIL PROPOSAL CAN BE OFFERED, WE HAVE RECHECKED TIMING WITH OUR SOURCES, WHO REPEAT THAT END OF MAY PRESENTS DESIRED DECISION POINT. DECISION POINTS COULD PERHAPS BE DEFERRED SOMEWHAT TO PERMIT CONSIDERATION OF A FIRM US OFFER, BUT NOT INDEFINITELY. WHILE WE DO NOT WANT TO STRING THEM ALONG WITH PROMISES OF DATA OR INDICATIONS OF AVAILABILITY ON WHICH WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO MAKE GOOD. OUR INSTINCT IS THAT WE WILL PROBABLY NEED TO GIVE THEM SOMETHING MORE TO GO ON SOONER THAN "SEVERAL WEEKS" FROM NOW, IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT OFFERING ALTERNATIVE.

5. LAST CONCERN IS THAT OF OUR LOCAL BYRD AMENDMENT EXPERIENCE; I.E., FOR SOME EIGHTEEN MONTHS, WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR APPROVAL OF SALE OF THE SLOWLY -SINKING EX-USS HALE. ACCORDINGLY, YOUR CLOSING PARAGRAPH MAY, IN FACT, INDICATE THAT OUR INITIAL ESTIMATE OF OUR PROBLEM AS AN UPHILL STRUGGLE WAS NOT PESSIMISTIC ENOUGH.

6. WE WOULD APPRECIATE PROMPT ADDITIONAL COMMENT ON ABOVE POINTS. IT SEEMS TO US THAT A RELATIVELY OPEN AND FAIRLY BRISK DIALOGUE BETWEEN POST AND WASHINGTON AND BETWEEN POST AND OUR COLOMBIAN SOURCES MAY BE NEEDED IN ORDER TO HELP ALL PARTIES CONCERNED DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO DO BATTLE IN A LOSING CAUSE.

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